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CHRISTIAN SCIENCE MONITOR
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LETTERS

Honduras — and the death of Major Zuniga

A Nov. 19 story by Dennis Volman, "Killing of Honduran Army officer linked to testimony in US," stated that "there is widespread suspicion that the death of Maj. Ricardo Zuniga Morazan in Honduras in September is tied to information he gave Senate intelligence committees [sic], congressmen, and ranking congressional staffers earlier this year and in 1984."

Major Zuniga never appeared, formally or informally, before the Select Committee on Intelligence nor did he, as far as we can determine based on our records and conversations with the staff, ever meet with members of the staff.

We are, of course, aware of reports from Honduras last year concerning alleged death-squad activity in that country, as well as recent stories that Major Zuniga's death was linked in some way to this issue.

There is, however, absolutely no basis for the claim that the death of Major Zuniga was related in any way to information he is supposed to have provided to our committee or its staff.

We note, furthermore, that your reporter apparently did not attempt to clarify this matter with the committee before writing these remarks.

Dave Durenberger, Chairman
Patrick Leahy, Vice Chairman
Select Committee on Intelligence
United States Senate
Washington

[Editor's note: The Monitor reaffirms that Ricardo Zuniga did meet with staff members of both the House and Senate Intelligence Committees. One of the sources for Dennis Volman's story was present at a meeting between Mr. Zuniga and a staff member of the Senate Intelligence Committee. Other sources for the story heard about the meeting from Zuniga himself.

It is true that Zuniga's meetings with both House and Senate staff members were informal; he did not submit sworn testimony. One of the references in the story refers to Zuniga's "testimony" and is therefore inaccurate and flowed from an editing error which the Monitor regrets. As the story made clear, Zuniga also spoke to many other people in Washington including congressmen, ranking congressional staffers, and journalists. The substance of what Zuniga said did get back to Honduran authorities, causing him some difficulties; however, the Monitor has no reason to believe that the Senate Intelligence Committee was responsible for the leak rather than any of the other people with whom Zuniga spoke.]

Meetings With Zuniga

I would like to supplement Dennis Volman's excellent article on the testimony of the recently murdered Maj. Ricardo Zuniga.

I organized and arranged for most of the meetings that Major Zuniga held in Washington in spring 1984 and January 1985.

The major point missing in the story is also the reason Major Zuniga overcame serious personal reservations and decided to speak with people in Congress. He had received what he regarded as reliable information that there was a concerted effort by United States intelligence agencies to force 21 officers of the Honduran Army out of the chain of command and five of these, including himself, completely out of the Army.

It was his understanding that these officers had been singled out for their opposition to aspects of United States policy and the byproducts of US policy. Specifically, he was very concerned about the human rights situation. He said that in 1981 the United States had helped set up a special operations battalion, Battalion 306. Battalion 306, according to Zuniga, was led by Maj. Alexander Hernandez, who at the direction of Gen. Gustavo Alvarez Martinez carried out kidnappings of citizens.

Throughout our conversations, Zuniga demonstrated strong concern about the nature and policies of the Nicaraguan government. As a result, he had strong sympathies for the Nicaraguan exile forces, particularly the Miskito Indians. Despite this, he was very troubled, as a Honduran military officer, by the involvement of FDN forces in the murder of Honduran citizens, and by the fact that the Honduran military was itself involved in these activities.

The solution, he and other young officers believed, was to pressure the United States, the FDN, and their own senior officers to purge from the FDN the individuals directly responsible for the human rights violations.

I do not know whether Major Zuniga's murder was motivated by political considerations. I do know that his decision to seek help in the US Congress was motivated by a desire to protect the sovereignty of the Honduran armed forces from interference by US officials, and because of his anger at the involvement of the Honduran Army in human rights violations similar to those that have occurred in El Salvador and Guatemala. He told me that "Hondurans do not kill each other over politics."

But Nicaraguans do, and from 1981 until early 1984 (at least) Nicaraguans were used by a couple of Honduran military commanders to carry out "military intelligence" operations that left perhaps 100 Hondurans dead. No action has been taken to bring those responsible to justice.

Bruce P. Cameron, Former Legislative Director
Americans for Democratic Action, Washington

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